Seven Strategies for First-Semester Challenges

Your student is in a world full of new challenges. How can you be supportive without being intrusive? Here are typical first-semester challenges, support strategies and what to do if you get “The Call.”

Challenge: Space
First-year residents are sharing less-than-roomy quarters with strangers, possibly for the first time. For most students, this requires significant adjustment. While they're making the adjustment, they may sound cranky and out of sorts, especially when they are stressed, overwhelmed and tired. Encourage them to get out and away from their room to gain a renewed and refreshed perspective. (A good night's sleep usually helps a lot too!)

Challenge: Time
More difficult academics, appealing activities, a new and different living environment, the freedom to come and go as they please—all these new realities may make your student feel pulled in several different directions. At the same time, your student must now manage time and set priorities alone, without parents or teachers to do it for them.

Challenge: Identity
First-year students are becoming acquainted with a new, exciting, multi-faceted social scene. They are working hard to figure out where they fit in amid developing relationships with students, faculty and staff. Even students that were popular in high school may struggle as they establish themselves at LMU.

Seven Support Strategies

- **Be a coach.** Your student wants to know you're supportive and approachable. To achieve that, your student may need to think of you and talk to you not just as a parent or guardian, but also as a friend, a supporter and a sympathetic sounding board.

- **Don't be judgmental.** It may be tempting to ask your student, "Are you doing your homework?" But that's a question better directed at a high school student. Instead, try non-judgmental conversation starters: "Which classes are your favorites?" "Which is the most challenging?" or "What's your roommate like?"

- **Show respect.** Acknowledge your first-year student's new independence and growing intellectual sophistication by asking his or her opinion on general social issues, current events and even family matters.
• **Get in sync.** You can be more supportive if you know the academic pressures your student is facing, such as midterms and finals. Become familiar with **important academic dates.**

• **Expect some changes.** Exposure to new people and a diverse environment will enrich your student's development, but it may also influence how he or she views the family. Be prepared and don't be hurt if your student seems dismissive or critical of your family activities or routines.

• **Stay connected.** Phone calls, Skype and text messages are great, but today's tech-savvy students still love old-fashioned letters, cards and care packages.

• **Revisit.** Check [Parent Pride](#) often to keep up with campus activities and articles on how to handle the adjustments and transitions of this first year.

**If You Get "The Call"**
Early in the fall of the first year, many families receive a call from their student, sounding stressed out, confused and even miserable. Resist the temptation to try to solve his or her problems yourself. Instead, express your trust in your student's ability to work through the problem and provide a lot of encouragement and reassurance that you know they can handle things. Remind your student of all the reasons he/she will become a successful LMU student. This is another great opportunity for you to be a coach! This is a major turning point in your student's life, and you need to be a source of stability and strength. Know that FYE can provide support to help your student work through most challenges they will face.

**Tips for Your Student**
1. Urge your student to take advantage of our [Office of First Year Experience](#). We major in freshmen! We have the resources, staff and programs that can make all the difference between a difficult and smooth transition, not to mention a well-tuned, sympathetic ear.

2. Involvement is a time-tested way to beat the blues. Ask your son or daughter to consider joining one of LMU's myriad of [clubs and organizations](#) where there is a group for every interest. If they aren't sure where to start, have them contact [Student Leadership and Development](#) for help finding just the right fit.

3. Physical activity boosts energy and boots out stress. Through [the Burns Recreation Center](#) and the [FitWell Center](#), students can take exercise classes, play intramural sports or participate in countless other activities for fun and fitness.

4. Feeling anxious about the transition to college is normal at first. However, if feelings of loneliness or anxiety last too long or affect your student's normal routines, there may be a more serious problem brewing. Our [Student Psychological Services](#) (SPS) offers free, confidential counseling services.

5. Be alert to the first signs of feeling academically overwhelmed. Getting extra help early on can turn first-year struggle into first-year success. Remind your student of
our Academic Resource Center, which offers free peer tutoring, writing assistance, and assistance with time management and study skills.

Be on the lookout for our next article, Benefits of Campus Involvement, where you’ll learn about engagement opportunities to share with your student.

Until next time!

Lisha Maddox
Associate Director of Student Success

If you have any questions or concerns, please email us at lmuparentprograms@lmu.edu.
Visit our Parent Pride website for additional articles and resources!